

Hosting Progressive Palaeontology: application process

Progressive Palaeontology (ProgPal) is a very successful postgraduate conference and has blossomed in recent years with more and more delegates from a greater range of institutions in attendance. In light of this, we have formalised the process by which future applications are to be assessed. The following process and criteria were put together by the 2017 Organising Committee, based on guidelines devised by the 2016 Organising Committee and in consultation with the Council of the Palaeontological Association.

Aims

The aims of this document are:

- to improve the transparency of the process by which bids to host the next ProgPal conference are assessed;
- to mitigate possible biases, perceived or real, in the decision-making process.

Application

Applications to host the next ProgPal conference should be received no later than the date specified on the website. An announcement of the closing date will normally be made on ProgPal social media and/or via e-mail some weeks prior to the deadline. This timing is intended to allow sufficient time for potential applicants to consider the feasibility of hosting the conference and to put together a robust application. It also allows the current committee time to assess all applications thoroughly prior to presenting their decision to the PalAss Council. Examples of previous applications can be provided, but applications are not expected to follow any specific structure. Applications should be kept to a maximum of two sides of A4 in length in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point (Arial font or equivalent), with margins of at least 2 cm. Please note that all applicants wishing to host the conference must be postgraduate students at the time of their application and when the proposed conference is to be held.

ProgPal is an accessible UK-based conference for early career researchers, especially for those with limited or no funding. Although applications to host ProgPal from institutions outside the UK have been considered previously, the PalAss Council have decided that the conference should continue to be UK-based. Other

conferences with very similar remits (for early career researchers in palaeontology) occur regularly elsewhere in Europe, such as the International Meeting of Early-stage Researchers in Palaeontology (IMERP). As a UK-based conference, ProgPal is not in competition with but is complementary to these other meetings. Applications to host ProgPal from overseas institutions will therefore not be considered. Delegates from overseas institutions are, however, strongly encouraged to present their work at ProgPal, and travel grants are available to help facilitate this.

Assessment

The process for assessing applications includes two additional criteria, and a weighting system to be used in the event of tied applications. All of these should be addressed in applications to host ProgPal. Criteria are as follows:

A) Essential

- a. Committee of suitable size, with the time and experience to run the conference.
- b. Suitable venue available for presentations and posters.
- c. Suitable and feasible field-trip location and plan.
- d. Local staff member available to guide and mentor the committee.

B) High priority

- a. Transport links/accessibility of conference venue.
- b. Accommodation available at reasonable costs.
- c. Suitable icebreaker venue.
- d. Suitable dinner venue.
- e. Potential funding options (funds should not be secured prior to application).

C) Desirable

- a. New initiatives that would enhance the student experience of ProgPal.

Each criterion will be scored either 0 (inadequate or no evidence), 1 (little evidence), 2 (meets criteria) or 3 (outstanding). Institutions that have not hosted ProgPal in previous years will be given an advantage in the decision-making process:

- 3 additional points will be given to applications from institutions that have never previously hosted ProgPal.
- 1 additional point will be given to applications from institutions that have hosted ProgPal in the past, but not within the previous three years.

- No additional points will be given to applications from institutions that have hosted ProgPal within the previous three years.

This is intended to encourage applications from a wide range of potential host institutions. This will be given the weighting of an 'Essential' criterion. The application with the highest score will be recommended to host the conference.

In the event of a tiebreak, the application with the higher score for 'Essential' criteria will be recommended to host the conference. If applications remain tied, 'High priority' criteria will be used in this way. In the event that multiple applications score equally across all three categories and a decision cannot be reached, the PalAss Council will be called upon to provide the casting vote. This overall process ensures that the current ProgPal organising committee retains the majority of the decision making and responsibility for selecting the next hosts, and in a transparent way.

Decision

A decision, based on the above criteria, should be reached by the current organising committee and then recommended to the PalAss Council. In the event of the host committee being unable to reach a decision, the PalAss Council will cast the deciding vote, although this is anticipated to be a very rare occurrence. All applicants will be made aware of the decision as soon as possible after the deadline. All applicants will be asked to keep the outcome of the application process confidential until a formal announcement is made. For the sake of continuity, the PalAss Executive Officer will act as the point of contact for any objections or queries that may arise following the announcement of the next ProgPal hosts. Each application will be returned with feedback following the conference. Unsuccessful bids are likely to need some improvement and/or updating, but could be used as the basis for a repeat bid in the future.